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Sustainable development

Statement submitted by Social Development Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

Our dying rivers

Rivers are the lifeblood of the economic and social life of Bangladesh. Its cultural life is also deeply related to rivers. It is extremely unfortunate that its three main rivers, the Ganges-Padma, Brahmaputra-Jamuna and Surma-Meghna, are dying. The latest study of Bangladesh reveals that 175 rivers are either dead or have lost navigability. As per a report of the Government of Bangladesh, India is controlling the water of 57 rivers along the Farakka barrage. Because of inadequate facilities for dredging, Bangladeshi rivers have become canals.

Apart from the scourge of the Farakka barrage, a new dam, Tipaimukh, is under construction in India. Our survival depends on saving our rivers. At this stage, we might consider increasing our capacity for regular dredging, stopping the dumping of effluents in the rivers, and continuing the cleaning of river beds.

As per the survey of the Government of Bangladesh, there are 110 rivers in Bangladesh. Out of these, 57 are border rivers, the condition of 175 is miserable and 65 are almost dead. Eighty-five per cent of the rivers lack proper depth. Already 75 per cent of the river routes have lost navigability due to silting. To obviate the problem of lack of capacity to dredge them, it appears to be advisable to try greater utilization of our unemployed manpower through the food-for-work programme, in addition to continuous dredging with our available rescuers. This entails, of course, planned dredging, river training and socio-economic development.

Starting with the Farakka agreement, since 1974, the rivers in Bangladesh have been dying. We are not certain about the water flow of 54 rivers. Our Joint River Commission appears to be rather ineffective. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has not so far been able to bring us any substantial benefit. Our membership in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation has not been of much significance to our needs. We have to take a look at our statistical data too. It appears that during the last 36 years (1974-2010) we have not been able to make any headway in the field of statistics, particularly statistics about rivers.

In the bilateral meetings with India, we depend mainly on Indian statistics, which are vastly superior to ours. Even in recent high-level meetings we had to depend mainly on Indian statistics. So the decision of such meetings are usually favourable to India. We must take immediate measures to improve our miserable position.

Our rivers are dying today. This will result in immense suffering for the entire nation. Therefore, the Government needs the support of the entire nation to ensure our survival. We must not dilly-dally with such a serious issue. It appears that we have no option except to take up the matter at the Development Cooperation Forum, on the theme "Development cooperation in times of crises: new commitments to reach the Millennium Development Goals", and at the Annual Ministerial Review and to draw attention of the world community to the matter.